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The significance of shifting capital of Kazakstan from Almaty to Astana: An evaluation on the basis of geopolitical and demographic developments

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Abstract

When Kazakhstan declared its independence on December 16, 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, most scientists were suspicious of the integrity and future of the country as the Kazakhs that were named after the country constituted only 41,3% of its population, which was already geographically non-proportional in a country, which was the ninth largest in the world with its 2,724,900 square kilometer surface area; the capital Almaty was geographically in close distance from China, which could pose a threat, in addition to a set of ethno political, ethno cultural and economic issues. Furthermore, the fact that the Kazakhs living in the north were actually estranged from their original identity and the self and finally have been Russified resulted in increasing the effect of sub-ethnic disintegration between the Kazakhs that were identified with certain geographical regions likely to constitute an impediment against national integrity. In 1997, the Kazak government resolved to move the capital from Almaty to Akmola, centre to Akmola administrative centre that was rich for agriculture and natural sources, also with a very significant geopolitical position. Next year, the name Akmola was changed for Astana, meaning the capital in Kazakh. At the time it was running as the capital, Astana was a small town, however in a short time it has become a modern and still-growing capital that united large ethnical groups under their Kazakh identity, a source of pride for the Kazakhs and one of the important centre of attraction not only for the Kazakhs but also for the entire Eurasia. This study intends to defend that the act of moving the capital to Astana has been one of the most significant reforms in rendering the country as one of the most consistent and strong territories in terms of politics and economics in Eurasia, with a concentration that the aforesaid issues have been overcome especially during such reform; and this has been scrutinised on the basis of geology and demographics. Observations, analyses and interviews with many different social strata in Astana nearly for a year and also in Almaty, which is the cultural and commercial capital to the country where I am still living, have been influential in coming to a conclusion for this study.

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1. Introduction

The territorial integrity and national security of Republic of Kazakhstan were under duress due to a set of demographical and ethno-geographical issues subsisting throughout the country on December 16, 1991 when it gained independence, as well as sub-ethnic disintegrations amongst the Kazakhs already identified with certain geographical regions, and economy-laden issues that were reminiscent of Russia. Economies of the republics that constituted the Soviets were structured to rely on substantially one another and particularly on Russia. None of the industries were capable of making progress as from the raw material all the way up to finished goods. A raw material being produced in a country was processed for intermediate product in another country and finally processed for finished goods mostly in Russia. In this way, Moscow was playing a centrist role, which was geopolitically and economically significant; functioned as a barrier to these republics' meeting their domestic demands and acquiring sufficient production capacity so that they would be dependent on Moscow in case of any possible collapse of the union. Kazakhstan suffered economically once one of the veins going to the shared circulation of the soviets was no longer functioning. For the newly-independent Kazakhstan, these were the times when a day was as long as a century, as the famous Kirghiz author Chinghiz Aitmatov put it. Gross national income of Kazakhstan receded by 36% in 1990-1995, thus the country became one of the territories that suffered from the most severe economic recession amongst the other territories of the now-collapsed Soviets. The said decline meant 7% recession per year on average.¹

Most scientists were looking at the future of Kazakhstan with suspicion due to the troubles explained above. At the end of the twenty two countries that elapsed, Kazakhstan confuted the estimations, overcame its big troubles and managed to stand on its own legs. Thus, it became the one unique country that handled the problem- despite all troubles and drawbacks- competently amongst the other commonwealth of independent states. In a short time, Kazakhstan became politically one of the most consistent and key countries of the Eurasia geography and economically one of the fastest-growing economies with 8% rate of growth per year on average around the world. Gross national product of Kazakhstan reached 200,642 billion US\$ in 2012, and per capita income was 12,021 US\$²; it is anticipated that the given figure will have reached 15 thousand US\$ by 2016.³ Kazakhstan has attracted 186 billion US\$ investments since 1993 hitherto.⁴ It is nominated one of top 20 countries that are attractive for further investments today, and it aims at becoming the first fifty countries around the world by 2030. With its foreign policy based on rational foundations, it is still one of the important actors for international politics. Formerly being deprived of even the smallest diplomacy and tradition for international organization, it hosted the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2010, followed by Winter Olympics of Asia in 2011, in addition to another big organization such as Astana Expo-2017. It has grown up to become a very significant regional power where international issues such as Iran's Nuclear Programme and Afghanistan were discussed.

During that time, ethno geographical problems that were more like a necrosis to the overall country were substantially eliminated; and the country attained more integrity than ever since the domination of Russia amongst the Kazakhs that were identified with certain geographical regions likely to constitute an impediment against the national integrity, more specifically Great Subdivision living in the south, Median Subdivision living in the north and Small Subdivision living in the west. On taking some sounding in the society, nearly 130 ethnical groups that are living in Turkey, including Russians, adopted their identity as Kazakhs and are already proud of their country.

¹<http://www.stat.kz/publishing/20111/KazNezav.pdf>

² <http://www.stat.kz/Pages/default.aspx>

³ <http://invest.gov.kz/upload/docs/f41c8f60df4b0703ac1c5ceb4124fa0b.pdf>

⁴ <http://invest.gov.kz/upload/docs/f41c8f60df4b0703ac1c5ceb4124fa0b.pdf>

Seeing Kazakhstan as its own sphere of population, Moscow defended that colorful revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan were intended to break off these countries from Russia thoroughly, and it was anxious that the uprising spread to Kyrgyzstan (Dugin, 2012: 384). With the politics of excellent balance followed, Kazakhstan showed to the entire world how to apply a zero problem policy with the neighboring countries even though it was undergoing major boundary-oriented problems at the time. Despite the moves made for Russia and China, the relationships with the two countries are on a strategic level.

It takes an in-depth analysis of the geographical properties of Kazakhstan in order to understand the ethno cultural and ethno geographical structure, the reason why moving its capital was necessary, its culture, troubles, pros and cons. Having a quite large surface area of 2.724,900 square kilometers, Kazakhstan is situated right in the heart of European geography, putting the country in a strategic position bridging over between Russia and China, which, in turns, is quite likely to pose a threat to its nation wise security. Even though Kazakhstan is the largest ninth country in the world, as far as the surface areas are concerned, number of persons per kilometer is only 5,7. Furthermore, Kazakhstan shares the longest land border of 7.591,1 km, which is an unresolved and controversial issue with Russia in the north, and another land border of 1.782,8 km with China, which is the most crowded country in the world, and is also very likely to pose a threat for Kazakhstan in the southeast. In addition to these, the country shares 2.351,4 km, 1.241,6 km and km land borders with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in the southwest respectively. One of the primary duties of the state is to preserve the national borders. Total length of the land borders, for which Kazakhstan has to preserve, is 13.392,6 km. It is also the country that has the longest coast to the Caspian Sea with 2340 km. Its coastal line to Aral Sea is 1,070 km (Ahmetov, Berdigulova, 2011: 11-12).

2. Moving the Capital from Almaty to Astana

How then did Kazakhstan sort out so many problems and make such great accomplishments in a short time? Changing capitals has a historical significance and uniting power for all states. It has been witnessed repeatedly throughout the history that most countries preferred to dislocate their capital. To give examples, Brazil moved its capital to Brasilia in 1960, Finland from Turku to Helsinki, Norway from Trondheim to Oslo. When the east and West Germany united, the first thing they did was to dislocate the capital to Berlin. As for the Russians, they moved the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg during the reign of the Great Petro with a view to develop a western-style state. Such a radical decision made by Kazakhstan is rather a historical attempt considering the solution of its then-current troubles. In our opinion, no other dislocation of a capital throughout the history was as effective as that of Kazakhstan's from Almaty to Astana, which occurred in 1997. Kazakhstan had to solve all of the foregoing problems in a single move, which was equally important for its geopolitical and geostrategic position. The said move was the dislocation of its capital in our opinion. Kazakhstan gave birth to Astana, which, in turn, became a symbol of the country's independence and integrity. On being asked the statements that set a good example for him, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan said that the very first name was M. K. Atatürk, the founder and first president of Republic of Turkey (Nazarbayev, 2006:11). The fact that Atatürk moved the capital from Istanbul to Ankara in 1923, and that the late Turgut Özal, who was loved very much in Kazakhstan and is known to have been on very good terms with Nazarbayev, suggested in favour of dislocation of the capital up to the north were specified to be influential on such dislocation. What lies beneath Kazakhstan's current state is the dislocation of its capital back in the time.

Capital to Kazakhstan was Orenburg, a northern province, until it was added to the Russian territory. Kızılorda became the capital in 1924. After that, the capital was moved to Almaty in the south in 1928. However in 1927 Kazakhstan resolved to dislocate the capital from Almaty to Akmola, the center to Akmola administrative unit, which is rich for agriculture and natural resources with a significant geopolitical position. Next year, it was renamed Astana, which means the capital in Kazakh language. The province was established as a military guard post in the nearby of River Esik in 1830 during the reign of Tsardom Russia. Its name was changed to Tselinograd during the Soviets' dominance in 1961. Tselini means 'untouched' in Russian, and the name was given on purpose with a hint for the virgin soils of North Kazakhstan and South Siberia. The province was named Akmola, meaning 'White temple' (or 'White Shrine') in Kazakh language in 1992. The decision to dislocate the capital to Akmola was

approved on July 6, 1994, and dislocation of the capital from Almaty to Akmola was finally declared on December 10, 1997. On May 6, 1998, the province was renamed as Astana, meaning the capital in Kazakh language.

Almaty has an orderly environmental planning, established on the Tanri Mountains' skirts; it is all green to an extent that houses are well-hidden in the green belt, so to speak. Despite the fact that the province enjoys a good geopolitical position in that it bridges over Kazakhstan and other republics of Central Asia, there were problems such that the province was only 302 km distant from the boundary with China (Horgos), was situated on the seismic zone, and thereby frequently subject to earthquakes, the Kazakhs were densely populated in the south and continued to do so, the Russian citizens held offices in key civil services inherited from the reign of the Soviets and there were difficulties of replacing them with the new personnel. Dominated by the Soviets' personnel and mindset, Almaty was having difficulties with ensuring integrity throughout the country. Geographically situated in the South Siberia, Astana is a province where winters last nearly for 8 months, and weather conditions are harsh compared to that of Almaty. Average temperature prevailing in Astana is -18°C in winter and 20°C in summer. The winds are very strong in Astana where we lived nearly for a full year. The temperature decrease to -40°C in some cases, and sensible temperature is sometimes -55°C due to strong winds. And yet, even though it is situated in the moorland and semi-marsh, and despite the prevalence of harsh climatic conditions and difficulties of construction and living, Astana still has an excellent geostrategic and geopolitical position for finding remedies to disturbances in the country and making differences and different regions familiar with one another.

3. Demographic and Ethno Geographical Issues

The word *Kazakh* means 'manful, resolute, courageous'. Kazakhs were the last nation to surrender to the Russians in the Central Asia. Head of the last Kazakh Ruler Kenesari is being exhibited in a museum in St. Petersburg. What happened in Almaty on December 17-18, 1986 ignited the collapse of the Soviets. The Kazakh people that were named after the country were only minority at the time Kazakhstan gained independence. And the country was a home for a myriad of ethnicity. Kazakhstan was the sole independent republic that did not form majority of the Titues community in the post-Soviet geography. Such an ethnical disintegration was a result of the banishment of almost 500,000 Germans, around 250,000 Chechens, 95,000 Koreans, over 80,000 Ingushetians, over 35,000 Carachais, almost 30,000 Polish and 30,000 Meskhetian Turks and over 16,000 Balkans by the Soviet regime, in addition to the Russian migration that began in the 18th century during the Russian Tsardom, fastened upon settlement of the Russian peasants in Kazakhstan as per an agreement executed in 1889 and continued during the Soviets' rule (Arslan, 2011: 50-53). The Kazakh population constituted the majority in Kizilorda and Atirau formerly known as Guryeve) only in the 1940-1980s (Ahas, 2003:73).

According to the population census performed in 1897 in the Tsardom Russia, the population of Kazakhstan was 4,1 million people, and Kazakhs formed 81,8% thereof with 3.392,8 thousand people; Russians formed 11% with 454 thousand people, followed by other ethnic groups of 7,2% with 300 thousand. According to the population census performed in 1926 in the Soviets, the Russians formed 20,6% of it with 1.271,1 thousand people, followed by 20,9% of other ethnic groups with 1.293,7 thousand people. Kazakhs formed 58,5% of it with 3.627,6 thousand people. Poor policies followed in the Soviets back in 1931-1933, resulting in the great hunger, 1,8 million Kazakh people (corresponding to nearly 41% of the population) perished, and approximately 600 thousand Kazakhs had to migrate to Iran, China and Mongolia. According to the population census performed in 1937 in Soviet Union, the population of the Kazakh people diminished to 2.862, thousand corresponding to 42,6% of the population. The Russian population increased, reaching 1.917,6 thousand corresponding to 37,4%. The Kazakh population diminished substantially during the WWII, and it was still limited to 2.794,9 thousand (30%) in 1959. However in the 1970s, it began to increase again and reached 4.234,1 thousand (32%).⁵ The Kazakh population became a minority in their own territories simply because of all these fluctuations in the population, famine, warfare, inclusion of Kazakh settlements in Russian, Uzbek and Chinese territories by relying on man-made boundaries.

⁵ <http://www.heritagenet.unesco.kz/kz/content/history/portret/goloshekin.htm>

Kazakhstan is composed of 16 administrative regions, namely Akmola, Aqtobe, Almaty, Atirau, East Kazakhstan, Jambil, West Kazakhstan, Karagandi, Kostanay, Kizilorda, Mangistau, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, south Kazakhstan, city of Astana and city of Almaty (See the Map 1). 65 to 75 per cent of the population is composed of Russians and the Kazakh people estranged from their identity in North geographical region, which is situated in the boundary to Russia, and administratively in Akmola, and in North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Karagandi, West Kazakhstan and Pavlodar. For instance, according to the population census performed in 1989, the Russian population ranged between 45 and 65 per cent in East Kazakhstan, Karagandi, Kostanay, Akmola (Tselinograd), whereas the Kazakh population ranged between 17 and 28 per cent. One million inhabitants were living in Akmola region where the capital of the country was moved to. 448 thousand of them (corresponding to 44,7%) were Russian; 123,7 thousand (corresponding to 12,3%) were German; 94,4 thousand (corresponding to 9,4%) were Ukrainian; 28,7 thousand (corresponding to 2,8%) were Belarusian, and Kazakh population was 224,8 thousand (corresponding to 22,4%).⁶

One of the major problems for the Kazakh people, whom were no more than a minority in their homeland, was the Kazakh people that were alienated from their own roots and cultures that spoke Russian and adopted Russian culture. According to the estimations, and depending on the data obtained from the population census performed in 1989, 64% of the Kazakh people expressed that they could speak Russian very fluently, whereas in the 90s, 25 to 40% of them could speak little or no mother language. The given rate was even higher in the North Kazakhstan (Aydingul, Tufekcioglu, 2012: 97-98). Regaining the degenerated Kazakh population that usually settled down in the northern side of the country and was being called 'Black Russian' or 'Mankurt' was particularly meaningful for the territorial integrity.

Total population of the Kazakhs all over the world is around 14 million. On taking a closer at the geographical distribution thereof, one can see that 10.764 thousand of the given population live in Kazakhstan, while 1.462 thousand live in China⁷, approximately one million live in Uzbekistan, 647 thousand live in Russia, 101 thousand in Mongolia⁸, 40 thousand in Turkmenistan, 33 thousand in Kyrgyzstan, 20 thousand in Turkey, 5,5 thousand in Ukraine, 4 thousand in Iran, 3 thousand in USA and 1,3 thousand in Belarus.

Even though they have approximately 700 thousand inhabitants living in Russian Federation, Kazakhs do not have an autonomous region in Russia where their geographical distribution is as follows:

Astrahan (149.415), Orenburg (120.262), Omsk (78.303), Saratov (76.007), Volgograd (46.223), Tumen (19.146), Samara (15.602), Kurgan oblast (11.939), Novosibirsk oblast (10.705), Moscow (9.393), Altai Krai (7.979), Autonomous Republic of Kalmyk (4.948), Autonomous Republic of Bashkortostan (4.373) and in other regions that have a boundary to Kazakhstan.⁹

The Kazakhs intended to alter the demographical situation upon independence, and encouraged domestic migration from other regions to Astana as they dislocated the capital with a view to ensure well-balanced distribution of its population there. Furthermore, the country has been following a state programme that means 'Bright Migration or Return' (*Nurlu Kös* in Kazakh language) as from 2008 in order to encourage Kazakhs living abroad to turn back home. According to the official data provided, approximately 1 million Kazakhs turned back home in 1993-2009¹⁰. Thanks to a set of reformed made in the country; the Kazakh population surpassed 50% in the population census performed in 1999 as shown in Table 1 below. As it appears from the data relating to the year 2009, the share of the Kazakh population throughout the country reached 63,1%. The term '*oralman*' (home-comer in English) is used for the Kazakhs that turn back home from overseas countries. Thanks to a set of reformed made in the country, the Kazakh population surpassed 50% in the population census performed in 1999 as shown in Table 1 below. As it appears from the data relating to the year 2009, the share of the Kazakh population throughout the country reached 63,1%.

⁶ <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2002/071/analit03.php>

⁷ <http://news.nur.kz/145183.html>

⁸ http://www.toollogo2010.mn/doc/Main%20results_20110615_to%20EZBH_for%20print.pdf

⁹ http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Materials/pril2_dok2.xlsx

¹⁰ <http://www.parlam.kz/ru/president-speech/23>

Resolution to dislocate the capital is crucial to understand the priorities of Kazakhstan in the build-up of a state. Following a foreign policy that requires being on good terms with Russia due to a potential threat from China; Kazakhstan's resolution to dislocate the capital from Almaty to Astana should be recognized as a move against Russia and China simultaneously. The fact that ethnical Russians, majority of which predominantly live in the northern parts of Kazakhstan, demand for being affiliated with Russia is already known. We have witnessed many times before in Moscow that some political party leaders in Russia claim that the northern parts of Kazakhstan are Russian territories, thus they should be included in Russia. On the other hand, based on the phenomenon that the Kazakhs living in the north of the country have been gradually estranged from their mother language and cultures, the Kazakhstan government placed the Kazakh people coming from the inside and outside Kazakhstan in this region within the framework of dislocation of the capital. In this way, the government nipped any future and potential problems in the bud and balanced the distribution of population throughout the country. Astana is the city where population growth is the highest in overall Kazakhstan, and according to the population census of the year 2013, the population in the city reached 780,880 thousand.

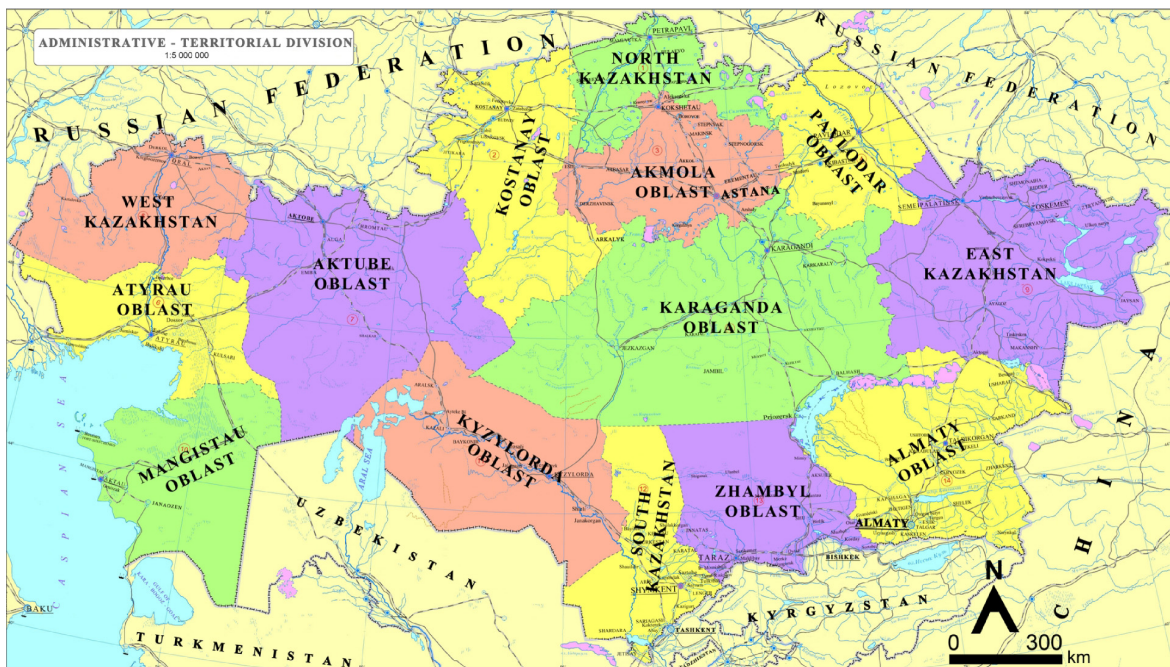


Fig. 1. Political Map of Kazakhstan

According to the population census of Astana in the years 1989-1999-2012, and as it appears from Table 2 that shows its demographical modification, it is possible to gain insight about the demographical modification in the north. In addition, dislocation of the capital to a nearby province where the Kazakh population living in the north and substantially Russified is settled is utterly important as an attempt and will to gain these Kazakh population and to keep separatist Russians under control in the region. Upon dislocation of the capital, which resulted in transition of population and power to the north of Kazakhstan, the Russians living in the area were kept under control competently. Astana has united approximately 130 nations living in Kazakhstan under the same roof, reminding them of the boundaries of the nation and in which country they are living. In parallel to the revert to type by the Kazakhs living in the north, Russian people show gradually more interest in learning Kazakh language.

Besides, the importance of dislocation of the capital is that it means dislocation of the state. Also necessitating the dislocation of governmental institutions, the resolution enabled establishment of new personnel by placing the Kazakhs that migrated to the capital for holding posts there. More importantly, most statesmen from SSCB era and

that tie the country down stayed in Almaty. Dislocation of the capital reveals that it is a break-off with the Soviet Union in the strict sense. As a matter of fact, it would not be incorrect to call these geopolitical and geostrategic moves that are triggered by dislocation of the capital as a 'Silent Revolution'.

Table 1: Ethnical Structure of Republic of Kazakhstan according to population census of the years 1989¹¹, 1999¹² and 2009¹³

Nation	Population census of the year 1989 (thousand person)	Share in the overall population (%)	Population census of the year 1999 (thousand person)	Share in the overall population (%)	Population census of the year 2009 (thousand person)	Share in the overall population (%)
Entire population	16,199	100	14,950	100	15,674	100
Kazakhs	6,700	41,3	7,900	53,4	10,967	63,1
Russians	6,000	37,4	3,900	29,9	3,793	23,7
Ukrainians	875	5,4	547	3,7	333	2,08
Uzbeks	331	2,5	370	2	456	2,8
Uighurs	181	1,1	210	1,4	224	1,4
Tatars	320	2	249	1,7	204	1,2
Germans	946	5,8	353	2,4	178	1,1
Other nations	846	5,2	1,421	9,5	721	4,5

4. Sub-Ethnical Disintegration between the Kazakhs (Subdivisions and Urugh)

On taking a look at the history of Kazakh people, one come across the Urugh-tribes and the concept 'Subdivision' they are involved in. Kazakhs are composed of 'Three Subdivisions' and 36 Urughs. The Subdivisions are living in 3 different geographical regions of the country (See Table 3). It is known what the word Subdivision means and when exactly it was derived; nevertheless there are many opinions, theories and legends about it. What should be highlighted rather than the time the Subdivisions emerged is the trace of geographical properties of the area they lived as can be found if characteristics and cultural structures are examined. For this reason, it is important to be familiar with the physical and geographical characteristics of Kazakhstan so as to understand and get to know these Subdivisions. 44% of the area covered by Kazakhstan is composed of deserts, 14% is semi-deserts, 26% is moorland and 5,5% is forest. Altai Mountains extending along the east of Kazakhstan; the God Mountains, also known as Tyan-Shan extending along the southeast, and Jongar Alatau and Saur-Tarbagatay, extensions thereof are the biggest mountains in the country. Han Tengri of the God Mountains (Tyan-Shan) is the highest summit with 6,994 meters to the peak. The Hole of Karakiya is the lowest place (123 mt) in the East Kazakhstan. There are large and small rivers up to 7000 that dry out in summer. Some of the major rivers are the Caspian Sea, which is the largest river that covers 374 thousand square meters in the world, followed by Aral Sea with 46,64 thousand square meters, Balkans River with 18,2 square meters in drainage basins. There are 7 large rivers that are longer than 1000 square meter each. Ural (Jayik) River, which is 1.082 square meter long only within the boundaries of Kazakhstan, is born from Russia and pours into the Caspian Sea; and passing through 140 km long River Sirdarya Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, it pours into Aral Sea; likewise 1700 km long River Irtysh meets River Obi in Russia and pours into the Arctic Ocean and finally River Ili pours into River Balkhash (Vilesov *et al.*, 2009:7-15). Ship transportation activities are performed in Irtysh, Esil and Jayi. There are 48 thousand rivers of various dimensions throughout the country.

11 http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=5

12 <http://www.stat.kz/digital/naselsenie/DocLib/hs2009naq.xls>

13 http://www.stat.kz/p_perepis/DocLib1/Аналитический%20отчет.%20Итоги%20Национальной%20переписи%20населения%202009%20года.pdf

The Caspian, Aral, Balkash, Alagol, Zaysan, Tenghiz, Sileti are the major rivers. River Aral situated in the southwest shrinks due to the ebb. A substantial part of the rivers are very salty, thus they are involved in salt production. Balkhash and Zeysan are however major rivers with soft water. The natural vegetation of Kazakhstan varies from north to south.

Table 2: Ethnical Structure of Astana according to population census of the years 1989¹⁴, 1999¹⁵ and 2012¹⁶

Nations	Population census of the year 1989	Share in the overall population (%)	Population census of the year 1999	Share in the overall population (%)	Population census of the year 2012	Share in the overall population (%)
Total	281,252	100,00	319,324	100,00	742,918	100,00
Kazakhs	49,798	17,71	133,585	41,83	480,815	66,80
Russians	15,2147	54,10	129,480	40,55	188,928	23,35
Ukrainians	26,054	9,26	18,070	5,66	13,453	1,81
Tatars	9,339	3,32	8,286	2,59	9,937	1,34
Germans	18,913	6,72	9,591	3,00	7,930	1,07
Belarusians	8,220	2,92	5,761	1,80	3,834	0,52
Koreans	1,329	0,47	2,028	0,64	4,981	0,67
Uzbeks	640	0,23	429	0,13	8,166	1,10
Polish	2,762	0,98	2,537	0,79	2,412	0,32
Ingushetian	1,889	0,67	1,822	0,57	2,732	0,30
Azerbaijanis	997	0,35	902	0,28	2,978	0,40
Kyrgyz	94	0,03	196	0,06	1,808	0,20
Chechen	514	0,18	752	0,24	1,063	0,14
Bashkir	1,187	0,42	870	0,27	1,009	0,14
Armenians	814	0,29	576	0,18	790	0,10
Moldavians	1,004	0,36	629	0,20	700	0,09
Uighurs	53	0,02	161	0,05	881	0,12
Others	5,498	1,64	3,649	0,83	8,711	0,90

The moorland area covered by small forests and woodland in the north is replaced by deserts in the south. Brooks are often composed of woodland and brushwood. Altai and God Mountains are covered by pine trees. In other words, one could put forth that Kazakhstan is generally composed of three different geographical regions and of three Subdivisions living in these regions. If one asks questions about the Subdivision to any Kazakh citizen, the following characteristics, which are known to and recognised by almost everyone, are mentioned: Give a bucket to a Great Subdivision and make him a shepherd; give a pen to a Median Subdivision and make him a judge; give a sword to a Small Subdivision and send him to the enemy. Prominent Kazakh authors such as Abay Kunanbayev, Bogenbay Batir and Kabanbay Batir come from Median Subdivision.

Subdivisions are very important for the Kazakhs. When two Kazakhs meet and ask their family name and given name to one another, the second question they want to know is where he or she is from. “*Kay elsin?* = Where are you from?” The answer to this question tells what Subdivision and Urugh the person comes from. The reason why they do this is because Kazakh people want to know who their ancestors are as they are very respectful to them.

14 <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2009/0389/analit07.php>

15 http://www.stat.kz/p_perepis/DocLib/pdf

16 http://www.stat.kz/digital/naselsenie/2012/2013/%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B9/03_2013_%D0%AD-14-05-%D0%9C.xls

Each Subdivision and Urugh and tribes, which are constituents thereof, point at affinity and kindredship of seven generations. Kazakhs have a proverb, it translates into English as follows: “Whomever does not know his seven generations of ancestors is ignorant (fool) (Moidabayeva, 2002: 28).

Table 3: Subdivisions and Urughs in Kazakhs

Subdivisions, and Geographical and Administrative Regions They Live	Urugh	Tribes
<i>Great Subdivision; South Subdivision (Sirderya River Basin and Seven Rivers (Yedisu) region, Fertile Lands of River Aris, Flatlands eligible for stockbreeding)</i>	1. Sarı Uysun	Bura, Taylak, Bori
	2. Kanlı	Kara-Kanlı, Kızıl-Kanlı, Kapsan-Kanlı, Sarı-Kanlı
	3. Sirgeli	Aytbozım, Akkonirdek, Bayjigit, Batır, Elibay, Jaydak, Janabay, Kayshili, Karabatır, Karakonirdek, Tutanbali, Togonas, Shaldar
	4. Shapırashtı	Aykim, Asıl, Ekey, Eskoja, Kebenek, Shıbıl
	5. Jalayır	Akbiyum, Andas, Arıktınım, Baychigir, Balgali, Kalpe, Kayshılı, Karachapal, Kushuk, Mirza, Oraktı, Siırshi, Sipatay
	6. Istı	Oyık, Tilik
	7. Oshaktı	Atalık, Baylı, Konır, Tasjurek
	8. Dulat	Botlay, Janıs, Sikım, Shımır
	9. Suan	Baytugey, Tokasrtan
	10. Alban	Bayseyit, Igilik-Baba, Ayt, Konır-Berik, Krıstık, Ak-Kıstık, Kızıl-Berik, Aytbozım, Aljan, Jartı, Kurman, Segiz-Sarı, Shogan
<i>Median Subdivision; Central, North and North-East Kazakhstan</i>	1. Kerei	Abak, Ashamaylı, Shivoyın, Shubaraysır, Merkit, Baynazar, Koshebe, Malik, Janat, Jantekey, Jadik, Sarbas, Karakas, Kosay, İtimgen, Kultay-Bolat, Koncadak, Sıban, Balta, Tarishi, Molkı, İteli, Terushi
	2. Nayman	Ak-Nayman, Baganalı, Bayjigit, Baltalı, Bura, Karakerey, Kartay, Kojambet, Kokjarlı, Kırji, Matay, Murın, Sadır, Trestamgalı, Torgul
	3. Argın	Atıgay, Besentim, Begendik, Jogarı-Shekti, Kanjıgalı, Karakesek, Karaulı, Kaundık, Suyunduk, Taraktı, Tobıktı, Tomengi-Shekti, Shuburtpalı
	4. Kipczak	Karabalık, Kodenen, Kulan Kılshak, Torıaygır, Uzun
	5. Konırat	Konırat
	6. Uak	Abray, Ajibek, Shoga
<i>Small Subdivision; West Kazakhstan (desert and bare moorlands, Aral Sea coats)</i>	1. Bayoglu	Sherkesh, Aday, Alasha, Altın, Baybaktı, Bersh, Esentemir, Jalpas, Isık, Kızıl-Kurt, Maskar, Taz, Tana
	2. Yediru	Tama, Tabın, Kerderi, Kereit, Teleu, Ramadan, Jagalbaylı
	3. Alimoglu	Shekshi, Karakesek, Karasakal, Kete, Tortkara, Shomekey, Asan
<i>Administrative Regions- Aqtobe, West Kazakhstan, Atrau and Mangistau regions</i>	1. Tore	
	2. Kojı	Akkorgan, Korasan, Duana, Karahan, Sunak
	3. Tulenguti	Nogaylı, Kurama

Source: (Muhamedjanov, 2012: 376)

According to the Kazakh traditions, solemnizing a marriage ceremony of men and women or members of the same generation and the ones involved in either one of the same seven ancestors, and the ones that are not divided by seven rivers cannot be performed today as it was the case in the past. Even though a man is madly in love with a girl and yet he figures out that there is an affinity in either one of their seven ancestors by Subdivision and Urugh, they began to see one another as a brother and sister. Subdivision and Urugh do not necessarily point at differences but at cultural richness. We observe that this particular tradition of the Kazakhs has been abused and utilized for ‘Divide and Rule’ policy at different chapters of the history mostly by some foreign powers run by Moscow, as well

as by some self-seeking domestic powers. To prevent such integration from happening, there are certain Kazakh idioms such as ‘Whomever is disintegrated by Subdivision hopefully gets his face [Subdivision] burnt’, ‘Straggler is devoured by the wolf’.



Fig. 2. Astana in 1999 (<http://yvision.kz/post/188839>)



Fig. 3. Astana in 2013

Kazakhstan is one of the richest countries for its natural resources and it is particularly significant for the energy resources. 3,2% of the world's petroleum reserves, 1,7% of the natural gas reserves, 21% of uranium are extracted from Kazakhstan.¹⁷ The fact that 90% of the petroleum and natural gas reserves are extracted from Atirau, Mangistau where the Small Subdivisions are living in Kazakhstan, in addition to West Kazakhstan and Aqtobe administrative regions pave the ground for exploiting the Subdivisions by foreign powers and self-seeking domestic powers. Presumably, building up a city that would unite all Subdivisions in the west of the country where Small Subdivisions are living, similar to the standards of Almaty and Astana in Kazakhstan, and that would be connected to one another by and railway is quite likely bury deep the problem not only theoretically but also practically.

In the light of travels I have made to different regions throughout Kazakhstan, and based on the interviews, observations and analyses in Almaty and Astana, it is utterly necessary to underline that what lies beneath the Kazakhs' being divided into three Subdivisions is definitely not attributable to an ethnical discrimination or difference because there are ongoing debates about the matter and some people argue that they come from different nations. A characteristic feature inherited by the Kazakhs from the Russians is the commencement of disintegration by way of letting the Subdivisions gain political powers severally once and if the central government (state) is weak –as we witnessed in the early 1990s. The more power the centre (state) gains the more loyal and united people become even though they are not in smooth waters economically. Sub-ethnic disintegration between the Kazakhs, in other words, existence of different Subdivisions and different Urughs amongst these Subdivisions, was a major challenge in early years of the independence in Kazakhstan. As the centre was weak in early years, the Subdivisions demanded even more for learning their identity, which, in turn, posed a threat to national integrity.

In the years when Almaty became the capital, it was functioning as the only central city that united representatives of all three Subdivisions. Upon dislocation of the capital to Astana, it was transformed from being idle- as shown in the photographs that unite and integrate these Subdivisions- to a brand new centre that was ultra-modern and that was a source of pride for its members. Kazakhstan become and will continue to be even stronger as these Subdivisions intermingle and unite.

5. New Capital Astana's Power of Uniting Other Nations under the Kazakhstani Identity

The most significant factor that plays a major role in the culture and life style of the Kazakhs is the geographical region dominated by moorland and desert, in addition to the existence of a number of rivers. Moorland is a

¹⁷ <http://www.akorda.kz/ru/category/kazakhstan>

prevailing culture in Kazakhstan. The foundation of this culture is shaped and dominated by tolerance and hospitality. According to the moorland culture that was built up in one thousand years, the Kazakh people have a strong belief that guests are sent by God and that they are divine. During different stages of the history, Kazakhs thought and embraced many exile nations as Go-sent guests, thus shared half loaf of bread with them, helping them out to survive under harsh conditions of the time. This is vital because it naively explains how the nations in Kazakhstan live peacefully compared to other geographies around the globe, even though they are ethnically complicated. During the interviews made with many other ethnical groups, it was clearly specified that they were grateful to the Kazakh people.

The new capital Astana upgraded the all-inclusive policy implemented in favour of all ethnical groups existing throughout Kazakhstan, and enhanced loyalty of those ethnical groups to Kazakhstan. Led by N.S. Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan in 1995, and rare in essence and nature in the world; the 'Assembly of the Kazakh People' was capable of uniting 130 ethnical groups living in the country under the same roof in the capital Astana. The seat of the Assembly of People is in the Pyramid building, one of the eye-catching structures of Astana as it also symbolises fraternity of people. The same building also hosts cultural centres of different nations, shrines and temples for 18 different religious beliefs, museums that unite ethnical groups under the same roof, libraries and conference halls. As a constitutional body, the assembly contributed to nationwide unity and stability by and between the ethnical groups, and tolerance to these ethnical groups was successful as a good and meaningful example for other countries. Cultural centres were opened and put into service for all peoples living in Kazakhstan, providing them with any and all opportunities to preserve their culture and make themselves heard. Nine members elected from the Assembly hold office as Members of the Parliament in the national assembly of Kazakhstan. The assembly is a remarkable unit of the national state policy, and is responsible for ensuring that affairs by and between the ethnical groups are maintained optimally. The conclusion drawn based on close observations and interviews is that there are neither conflicts nor disputes between many religious, ethnical and ideological groups living in Kazakhstan, and that the new capital Astana clinched the unity and environment of tolerance.

A set of attempts have been made to make the peoples living in the country even more familiar with one another. The Labour Day was announced as the day of brotherhood of people, and has been celebrated so since then. Kazakhstan gives great importance to the loyalty of all people living in the country to the state, and ensures that government gives opportunities to people to establish cultural organisations. Friendly houses were established not only in Astana but throughout the country. Apart from the Kazakh and Russian theatres, there are Uzbek, Uighur, Korean and German theatres performing and staging in the country. 35 different ethnical groups are able to publish their newspaper in 11 different languages. 88 schools around the country provide education in Uighur, Uzbek, Tajiki and Ukrainian as the medium of teaching; and in 108 schools, languages of 22 ethnical groups are taught as an elective course. Today, the Russians that live in Kazakhstan are factionalised and excluded when they turn back to Russia, their homeland, however people that have been exiled to Kazakhstan have always felt themselves at home thanks to Kazakh people's hospitality. The Russians that live in Kazakhstan have been influenced by the Kazakh culture and they are more tolerant and open to the out world compared to the Russians living in Russia. Russia has implemented a set of various incentives to call back the former citizens to their homeland with a view to sort out demographical problems subsisting in Russia. Even the Russian population that was rather apt to be bonded by and affiliated with Russia back in the 1990s and that migrated to Russia at the time had a desire to turn back to Kazakhstan. These Russian people feel themselves more comfortable in Kazakhstan, being a Kazakh is no longer a source of disturbance for them as in the case of the 1990s, on the contrary, they are proud of being a Kazakh.

Today, some Russian experts still construe Kazakhstan from Moscow's point of view, thus they fail to see the transformation that has already taken place; and they insist on evaluating and commenting that Russian citizens living in the north of Kazakhstan feel and consider that they belong with Russia, not Kazakhstan, and that they still want to be bonded by and affiliated with Russia (Gadjiyev, 2012: 424-425).

6. Conclusion

The old city is situated in the right hand side of River Esil, and in the left hand side it was a steppe and semi-marsh area only a decade ago however today it has an ultra-modern appearance. Kazakhstan is planning to have

rendered Astana one of the leading and prominent metropolises in the world by virtue of its strategic plan for Astana 2030. Works are still underway at full speed to this end. Turkish contracting companies have played and will continue to play a leading role in the build-up of Astana. Turkey has put its signature to many landmarks of the city such as 'Bayterek', which is the symbol of the city and means 'the tree of life', 'Ak Orda' the Presidential Palace, 'The Khan Shelter Tent', 'Pyramid of the Building for Brotherhood and Peace'. Each building in a city with an Astana theme and the new city has an idiosyncratic identity of its own.

The Kazakhs built up a city, which became a symbol of peace, tolerance, dialogue, coherence and stability. The fact that Kazakh culture and the culture of other ethnical groups living in Kazakhstan became one and untied with the world culture; Expo 2017, which is recognised as the third important international organisation after the Olympic games and world cup championship, will be held in Astana are important arguments to understand the current stance of the city today. The Russians have a saying: 'I prefer to see it once rather than hear it one hundred times.' Needless to say, the best way to understand Kazakhstan is to go to see the capital Astana and feel the heart beats of the city and of Eurasia there. Today, not only the Kazakh citizens but all other ethnical groups are proud of the new and modern look of their city, and they are united for their identity as Kazakhs.

Every time I go to Astana, I witness that it has been growing fast for its approach to urbanism and architectural masterpieces, the national integrity and power improve as it grows, and it reflects the dynamism of a modern Kazakhstan to the best.

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